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TRENSAS: BRAIDING HERITAGE, EXPERIENCE AND THEORY

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I. Subtextual Dilemmas of Identity and Authenticity

One of the earliest memories I have from my school years is about trensas, about my braids and of my mother braiding my hair. In 1955, I was seven years old. We lived one house from the railroad track in Las Vegas, New Mexico. I remember sleeping and waking to the subterranean rumble of the trains. We had an outdoor toilet. We spoke Spanish in the home and ate tortillas and frijoles. My mother worked in a parachute factory.

Economically, linguistically, culturally, we were typical of our barrio, but, educationally, we were unique. My father had obtained his G.E.D. and then his Bachelor's Degree on the G.I. Bill while working three jobs. 1955 was the year my father left us in Las Vegas to go to graduate school at the University of Southern California. 1955 was the year I began to think about myself in relation to White society, and I began to feel different. 1955 was the year I learned that, when one is different, it helps to have a

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